

Denise:

Women have been a part of carrying the gospel where it's not for generations. And part of the legacy they've left can be found in the courage their stories inspire in an entirely new generation of women who would go. But that legacy can only be realized if their stories are told. Welcome to the Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast.

Denise:

Hey guys, and welcome back to the Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. This is the podcast where we highlight the women who've inspired us to live our lives in pursuit of the lost. I'm Denise Beck, the executive director here at Velvet Ashes.

Sarah:

And I'm Sarah Hilkemann, the program director. And today we are so excited to bring you the story of Betty Greene.

Denise:

I'm really excited about this, Sarah, but one thing we always wanna point out is we aren't experts and we have done our research and studying, um, because we really wanna learn about these people, but also, you know, because we wanna bring you accurate information, but we just wanna remind you that we are not the experts. So if you end up knowing things that we have gotten wrong, we always invite you to email us or comment so that we can be sure that the information is accurate. What we really wanna do is encourage you, to light a fire inside of you to want to know more about these women. So you'll pick up those books, you'll do your own research and be more inspired. And we're hoping we're just piquing your curiosity about these amazing women of the faith. I will tell you, Sarah, I don't know about you, but I found this particular subject, Betty Greene, a little more challenging to find information on. What about you?

Sarah:

Which was surprising to me. I think most of us have probably heard of Mission Aviation Fellowship, and we will get into Betty's connection with that. And she, she lived a very fascinating life. She got to see a lot of different things. And so, yeah, I was surprised, honestly, that there was not more out there about her. And what we could find, you know, was, was more difficult to really get a good grasp of who she was I felt like.

Denise:

Yeah, I think the people that we have done before have themselves been writers. They have written books, they were good communicators, and we don't really get that sense from Betty Greene that that was something she was really passionate about. There were, you know, prayer letters and things that she was really great at coordinating communication, but we don't have a lot of her own words to help us get a feel of who she was. So it made it feel a little bit more difficult, but we still value these stories, even if they're harder to tell. And so we are just gonna jump right in and introduce you to Betty Greene.

Sarah:

Well, and I wish I could have known Betty Greene actually. Um, but she was born June 24th, 1920, near Seattle. She had a very close knit family. She had two older brothers, and she also had a twin brother

Bill. And her parents, you know, were strong believers. Um, and they just had a really sweet family connection. It seemed like it's hard for us probably to understand the interest and the love of aviation at this particular time in history when Betty was growing up. You know, most of us have flown on so many planes, we can't even keep track of the number of flights that we've been on, the airports that we've been in around the world. We probably have our favorite airport, our crazy flying story. But aviation at this time, when Betty was growing up, was so thrilling and exciting and interesting to people. And so you have people like Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, you know, these fascinating people who really at the time were the heroes in America.

Sarah:

And Betty actually had the opportunity to see Charles Lindbergh. He had completed his solo flight from New York to Paris in 1927, flying across the Atlantic. The whole world honestly, was following this flight. They were so excited for him, including Betty and her family. And so when Betty was eight years old, they actually got to see Charles Lindbergh when he came. He went all over the US, kind of his tour after he had completed this flight. And so Betty saw him fly over and then got to hear him speak. And this really was part of this growing interest in her heart and life in flying.

Denise:

You know, what I found fascinating is that she had an older brother who was 16 years older than her, and he kind of shared her love of flying, and he had his pilot's license, and it said that he had flown solo at 14 years old. And to me, I was just thinking think about how new flight was back then. You know, and I can't, even though we do it so frequently, I still can't imagine letting my 14 year old fly a plane today. You know? And so that just kind of blew my mind that it was, I don't know if it was the part of the, you know, America that they lived in or, or what, but for some reason, flying was something that her family was very involved in and felt very comfortable with, you know, and encouraged her in her love for that as well.

Denise:

This time of the world, you know, we're talking about twenties and thirties, if you remember things that were happening. You know, the stock market crash was in 29, and so flying was a bit of a luxury, and Betty's family was not immune to the financial trials of this time. It, they said, you know, they had a family car, but they had to put it up on blocks because they couldn't afford the gas for it. And she and her twin brother had to get a job picking cherries so that they could help their family buy groceries, you know? So there, this wasn't a family of luxury that flying was just, you know, Oh yeah, we're, we're very well off and we're just gonna do this. It, it was a sacrifice still for them to be able to do it. And in fact, also during this time, I think it was in 1928, the family was at a birthday party and got word that the smoke over the hill was their family home burning to the ground.

Denise:

And so, you know, they were extremely challenged during this time when Betty's love of flying was growing and, and so she's, you know, the ability to fly was maybe even in question because it seemed like everything was stacking up against her, you know, to not be able to, to have the funds to be able to pursue this dream. But I found that it was interesting that for her 16th birthday, she and her twin brother received a gift from their uncle of a hundred dollars each. My children would absolutely be floored to get a hundred dollars, you know, almost a hundred years later, I can't imagine what that gift meant like to them to get that. And so when she was trying to decide what she wanted to do with that,

the only thing that captured her attention was flying. And so she was asking her parents, Can I use this to get flying lessons? And, and they, you know, again, the support of this does not seem bizarre to them. They, they allow her to, with the stipulation of you have to use some of it to buy some new clothes. So I don't know if that speaks to Betty's. She didn't care about what she wore. <laugh> and her parents were like, Please care about what you wear. Or if it was just, you know what, the times are hard and we could really help us if you could help out with your wardrobes.

Sarah:

It was just practical.

Denise:

So college next on the horizon for any young adult, Um, do you wanna talk a little bit about her college years and what she decided to do, Sarah?

Sarah:

Yeah. So it seemed like she had a hard time deciding what she wanted to do, but her mother really wanted her to go into nursing. At this time there weren't as many options for women as far as careers or the jobs that they could do. And so Betty didn't necessarily wanna go into nursing. That wasn't necessarily her passion, but she honored her mother and went ahead with studying nursing for college. She plugged away at it, she persevered at it, but she really didn't like it, <laugh>. She just really struggled with it. So yeah, she studied for a couple of years, you know, made it a little ways into the program, but then decided to quit.

Denise:

You know, I have college students and I just appreciate so much, you know, her willingness to submit to her parents in what they wanted from her in this time, even though she just didn't like it. I think some of that also speaks into what women were expected to do and what was open to them. You know, nursing, teaching, you know, things like that seemed like the paths that women took. And honestly, that's a lot of what I got from Betty Greene and her story is, is how she kind of defied some of those roles that were expected of women and was willing to brave, you know, being a woman in a man's world, really, and how she handled that with such grace and dignity. And so, you know, we will get into that. And I love that it started with humility and submission to her parents. It wasn't like, I'm gonna go do what I wanna do. It was, No, let me first see if the Lord is asking this of me through you, you know, as my parents and, and her willingness to submit to that really comes back later to bless her. And so I, I appreciated that about her.

Sarah:

Well, and it also shows her perseverance, you know, that she was willing to stick with it even though it wasn't what she had ever been interested in or, you know, really saw for herself. But, um, I think we also see those threads through the rest of her story of just her perseverance and endurance in things.

Denise:

That's so true. That was a trait that was gonna be exercised quite often in the years to come for her. Um, but, you know, so she, she did, after she finished, uh, dropped out, I guess she didn't finish that particular degree, she began working for her father and was just, you know, kind of chugging along, helping him. He had a company that was called the Greene Electric Furnace Company. Sounds

fascinating. Um, but you know, at this time, her brother is going to become a missionary in China. And, you know, they encountered some rough things. Two weeks after they get there, all the foreigners were asked to leave and they decide to stay. And I'm sure that was just inspirational to her to think they're doing really hard things that matter, and me doing paperwork in dad's office is not doing it for me. And so she's, you know, wrestling with what's next, and she goes and seeks out the wisdom of somebody else, someone older than her, Mrs. Bowman, who was 70 years old, I'm assuming a long time family friend who she valued her opinion.

Denise:

And you know, when she goes over and just begins processing with her, Mrs. Bowman is really kind to just listen to her and allow her to voice frustrations. And then she begins asking her, you know, Well, what is in your heart? What do you love? What would you like to do? And you know, Betty's like, I like to fly, and I also really like helping out with church and telling people about Jesus. And, and Mrs. Bowman says something that really affects her. She says, I always think God plants his desires in our hearts, so we will act on them. And when I read that, I just really appreciated that. Mrs. Bowman, you were helping me all of these years later, but that, that the Lord, you know, those things that we love could be the things that he puts in our hearts that he wants to use to serve his kingdom.

Denise:

And as, as Betty was reflecting back on this time, several years later, she said, "I guess we all tend to think that the Lord's service must involve things that we don't wanna do. And I don't know why we always think that, because it certainly isn't true". And I think a lot of the things we as missionaries face are, we're doing something somebody doesn't wanna do. You know, a lot of times it's like, Oh Lord, please don't call me to, to Africa or to homeschool my children or something. You know, it's like the things I don't wanna do, and you're just sure that because you don't wanna do it, that's what the Lord's gonna call you to do. And Betty's like, No, I'm living proof that he planted something in my heart that he grew so he could use for his glory. So what is it in our hearts that the Lord has planted there, that we could ask him to grow for his glory so that we could also look back and, and just thank the Lord for allowing us to serve in a way that fulfilled our desires as well. Loved, loved that part of her story.

Sarah:

Yeah. And I just love how we see that expressed throughout her life and the encouragement that I know that has been, you know, as you said to you, to us, um, to so many other people through the years. I think sometimes, yeah, we tend to think mission work looks a certain way, like it's this one thing. And just to be reminded that God's kingdom is so much bigger than one way, one thing that we all need to be doing, that he has gifted us in so many different unique ways, and that we can experience joy in doing something that we're, we're gifted in, that we love and we can be serving the Lord at the same time. I think just, obviously there are, there are tasks and things that we don't want to do or we don't love that still need to be done, but I think yeah, when we get to just live in that joy and freedom of, of serving God in a way that he has gifted us with is just so amazing.

Denise:

Absolutely. And, and so as Betty like began to think, Lord, would you ever combine my love of flying and my love of missions together? Um, she heard about a civilian pilot training course that the University of Washington was doing. So this is, we're in war time now. If you're keeping up with history, this is 1941. The US was not at war, but they were preparing. And so they began to think, you know what, we might

need other people trained to be pilots if this does escalate. And there was a lot of debate going on about whether women could be a part of that or not. But there was this training course, and she was open and hoping that she could be a part of that, but was really concerned about convincing her parents. But when she brought it up to them, they were supportive because she had done what they asked, did, did what they asked her to do. She had submitted herself to their hope to be a nurse, and they were seeing, you know, she tried her best. It was not for her. So now we are going to encourage and support what she wants to do. And so, um, they allowed her to become a part of this civilian pilot training course, and it was 1941, 40 were accepted to the course, and only three of them were one of three women in the class of 40. Is that right? There was three women...

Sarah:

Yeah, there were 40 people and three women I think.

Denise:

Three women in the course. So that's just crazy in itself that she was, you know, willing to be a very small percentage of women. And I imagine they, you know, they probably got a little bit of ridicule in that. But, you know, they were practicing on the lake and she was learning how to land a float plane on the water, and, you know, she was able to go through this, but she was no closer in figuring out what the Lord was gonna do with her life whenever she finished. And so her parents were like, Well, why don't you just finish your degree, get a degree. So she did decide to get her degree in sociology, um, where she graduated in 1942. So she's gotten this training course, she's graduated from the university, and then she hears about something else, Sarah, what is the next phase of her life?

Sarah:

Yeah, So she read this article about a group of women pilots that were being formed to serve during the war. So when Amelia Earhart had disappeared, when she was trying to do her around the world flight in 1937, this woman named Jacqueline Cochran kind of took her place as the top female pilot at the time. They had actually competed in a race, Amelia Earhart and Jacqueline Cochran had. So Jackie Cochran came onto the scene as the top pilot, and as she saw, you know, things developing with the war, she really saw that there could be a use for women pilots in the war effort. And so she was working really hard to try and convince the military of this. She even wrote to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who agreed with her that this was a good idea that there could really be a use for these women.

Sarah:

But it was not until after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the US really got into World War 2, that the need became really obvious. And so Jackie Cochran started this program to train both inexperienced and experienced women pilots to help with taking planes from factories after they had been, um, built to the bases where then they could be used for the war effort, but then also they would help with flying target practice planes, testing new planes and repaired planes and doing different things like that. And so Betty read this article about, you know, this, this program, and, um, her parents actually surprised her. They went and saw a woman that was mentioned in the article, and they thought this would be a way that Betty could be involved in that, because she had her private pilot's license, she could qualify for the program. And so originally it was called the Women's Flying Training Detachment, and there were just a little bit over a thousand women total that were accepted into the training program, but there were actually more than 25,000 women that applied.

Sarah:

So Betty went, um, she went to Sweetwater, Texas for this training. Um, it eventually became known as the WASP program, the Women Air Force Service Pilots Program. It was not part of the military officially, it was a civilian program. But in this program and in the training, they learned things like radio communication. They learned how to read weather patterns, they learned mechanics so that they could, you know, do repairs on planes. They learned navigation. These are all incredibly valuable skills that Betty would use through the years. Um, just incredible training and the small number of women, you know, that were involved.

Denise:

Well, and wasn't she the youngest of them? I think it was like between ages 21 and 34, and Betty would've been 22 at this time. So she's one of the youngest to be a part of the WASP program.

Sarah:

Yeah. And to already come in, you know, with her pilot's license to already have some skills was really impressive. So after she graduated from training, she first went to Camp Davis in North Carolina. She was replacing two, helping to replace two other women who had died in training there. But she was not at Camp Davis very long. And then she transferred with another woman Ann Baumgartner to Wright field, and Wright field was the biggest air force airplane testing center in the world actually at that time. And they were testing different things with elevation. So what happens to the body, what happens with equipment when you are going very high <laugh> in the air, much higher than planes were really going at the time. So these two women, you know, had experiences of going 40,000 feet in the air in a bomber and had sensors taped all over them, You know, just testing those different things. And they were, yeah, the, the two women who were part of this testing program.

Denise:

Well, and when you think about it, they're the testing things that we appreciate today. Like, one of the things, um, that was a challenge during the war was the Germans could fly higher than we could, and they really felt like the edge was going to be given to whichever, you know, country could fly a plane higher because of where you could bomb and how you could bomb. And, and so whoever could figure out how a pilot or airman could breathe and not freeze to death and, you know, not pass out and all of those things, they were gonna have a, a leg up in the fight. And so she was, they were a part of this so that we could now, today without even thinking of it, fly in pressurized cabins and breathe freely and not even wonder, you know, but what they had to put their bodies through for us to be able to travel in such comfort is crazy.

Denise:

You know, I didn't even, it didn't even dawn on me to think and thank someone who was willing to potentially pass out or have limbs frost bitten because their glove falls off while they're parachuting. You know, it's like all of those things that were crazy. There's another story from this time, Sarah, that I found was fascinating. You said that they had to fly as target practice, and so they were flying these planes with something billowing behind them. And there's a story about, you know, Betty was a woman in a man's world, and the men didn't look kindly on these pilots, and they didn't really take them very seriously. In fact, some of the research said that the two women that passed away that they were replacing it was because some of the men had put sugar in the tank and, you know, made it unsafe for them to fly.

Denise:

And so it was just this, you know, constant fight to be taken seriously. So she is in this plane, she's piloting the co-pilot with her, does not take her seriously, is not giving her the time of day, but she's never flown for target practice before. And so she gets up, he has actually fallen asleep, you know, he's just like not interested in being with her. And these shells keep exploding so close to her plane, and she doesn't know if this is normal or not, because it is her first time to fly. And he, she doesn't want necessarily wake him up and have her think that she is afraid or weak or doesn't know what to expect. But eventually the shells are exploding so closely that they do wake him up and he is startled and is like, what is happening? And what they find out is it's an anti-aircraft gunner that they were practicing with. They had focused on the plane instead of the target that the plane was pulling. And, you know, luckily they were able to radio down and get them to stop firing at the plane. But just, you know, the danger that she was in, in this role was crazy.

Sarah:

Well, the WASP program just provided so much support, it allowed the male pilots to actually go, um, and serve, you know, overseas as part of the war effort, but they didn't necessarily get the respect that they deserved. They had been petitioning to actually have this be officially a military program. But that did not happen until the late 1970s, actually. And so it was this really valuable part of the war effort, but they didn't get a lot of recognition or respect at the time.

Denise:

Yeah, and it's important to point out some, some of the differences between the WASPs and the enlisted men was it was considered a completely volunteer program so they could leave at any time, which is not true of enlisted men. They did have to pay for all of their uniforms, their parachute, their goggles, everything. And they also had to pay room and board to be there. So it was a different scenario than the men who were enlisted who all of that was covered for them. Um, but it was during this time that Betty, you know, wrote an article to a magazine for teenagers that was published by the Scripture Union Press, and it was just about, um, you know, what, what she was looking forward to. And she was like, I'm looking forward to being a missionary, and I think flying is gonna be very useful for spreading the gospel.

Denise:

And, and an editor from Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship magazine read it and then asked her to write a similar article for a publication called His in the Spring of 1943. And it was part of that turn of events that, you know, her being able to write for some of these publications that garnered the attention of others who were similarly thinking and similarly minded in this connection of aviation and missions. And so, um, Jim Truxton actually wrote a letter to her saying that he had read her article and that she was not alone, that several others shared her vision to spread the gospel. And that three men had actually been meeting and praying for over one year about a plan to use military pilots to support missionaries. And I just can't imagine her hands shaking as she read this letter of just confirmation that what the Lord had put in her heart, he was also putting in other's hearts, and that there was some traction here in what was gonna happen in the future.

Denise:

And she began to just discuss with them, and they wanted to meet her in person to have time to talk a little bit about what does this mean? And, you know, and so they asked her to meet in DC and she just

happened to have an assignment that required her to be there. So she got to sit across and ask questions, and they, they began to formulate what later became the Christian Airman's Missionary Fellowship, C A M F. And the bones and the structure just kind of began forming in that time. Sarah, what happened next after the structure starting to be formed? What were the next turn of events as the Lord reveals this new season for Betty?

Sarah:

So Betty definitely wanted to be involved in this. Um, she was really praying about it, but she also didn't want to, you know, give up on her commitment to the WASP program. And so, you know, she was just really wrestling with what to do. Well, she found out that the WASP program was going to be disbanded. Jacqueline Cochran had been really fighting for the program to become part of the military. It had, that had failed and things were shifting in the war. And so it just was not needed. And so they had made the difficult decision to, um, end the program. And Betty happened to be flying with, um, her commanding officer, and she was able to get early release so that she could finish up her time, but then also get started with the CAMF office. And what they were hoping to get started.

Denise:

There was this story here at the very end of our time with the WASPs, where a friend had asked her to become a co-pilot with him in an experimental flight. And, you know, she was kind of like, Ugh, did I do this one last flight? You know? And she decided to say yes, and then she just didn't hear back from him. And she's like, Well, he must have figured a different co-pilot out. But she later found out that the plane that he had asked her to help with had exploded while he was flying it three minutes into the flight and all were killed. And she really felt like that was God showing her his protection over her, and that he was guiding her to something else, and that he would also protect her in what was next in the next chapter. And so, um, you know, as she really just felt the hand of the Lord guiding her to this next chapter with C A M F, um, Dawson Trotter was someone in LA who had provided an office space for her.

Denise:

And even though she was not the initial instigator of this organization, she was the first one who was able to be staff. Because when we mentioned earlier, the WASPs were volunteer, all of the other servicemen couldn't just leave their posts. They were enlisted and they hadn't been released. So she was the only military pilot who could in fact, leave her post and be stationed. And so in this way, being a woman, and this particular time worked to her benefit as it allowed her to be the only one trained in this way who could, um, lead the cause for CAMF. So an interesting thing, you know, I think she recognized she wanted to work in this way, but she also was not the instigator. She was not the man leading the charge. She felt a little bit awkward about being the one in the office who was the face of CAMF.

Denise:

So she said in a reply to, um, you know, to Jim was, Hey, "I am in with CAMF his servant, and I wanna do it as well as I possibly can, but I beg you, for his sake to be frank with me, on all matters. It is really wonderful to be co-laborers for our Lord Jesus Christ. Is it not? When we are absorbed with being well pleasing unto him, we become, we welcome the criticism of others to aid us in that effort". She's just saying, Hey, cut straight with me. If you see something that I need to change in or criticism that I need, don't be afraid to say it to me because I'm a woman, I can take it. And when we are doing this for the Lord, criticism is welcome because it's him that we wanna please and his work that we wanna accomplish, and we don't take offense.

Denise:

You know, we just want the best. And so she was recognizing this potential for awkward tension for her being in the office. But, and, and I think she also realized the heaviness of the work that they were asking to do. They were starting an organization with no planes and no pilots, and they were trying to sell the idea to other people, <laugh>. And so she said another quote that I love, she said, "Humanly, it's impossible, but when we know that the creator of the universe is our boss, everything is suddenly so simple". And I, I think who needed to hear that today? You know, are you trying to undertake something that you don't understand how the Lord could possibly do it, but if he's in charge, just stop your worrying. So, um, so because of the networking connections that she had, you know, because of Dawson Trottman, who was a great networker, she began to try to pull people in and cast this vision for CAMF. And, um, she began compiling the support that they needed. And she actually became a part of what was the first board for CAMF, and yet they still didn't have a plane. So they, they've been doing all this work, they've been casting the vision, and they still didn't have a plane. So Sarah, what is the first steps into work that they actually get a glimpse of here in the season?

Sarah:

So through some different connections, they were talking with Cameron Townsend, with Wycliffe, and he was sharing that they had a need to get into some of these more difficult places in Mexico, in Peru, in the places where they were working. And they were trying to get languages, um, written down for these local people so that they could get the Bible translated into their language. And this was kind of, you know, it was an exciting connection for them of, Hey, this is a way that we can actually help and learn more about opportunities to get involved. And so in 1945, things were kind of finishing up with the war, and Betty went to Mexico so that she could be on the ground and learn more of what was going on with the work of SIL there, and maybe what were some ways that their organization could partner with SIL and really help them. And so she had a chance to attend their jungle camp, which was kind of the introduction for SIL workers to get a taste of what is, what is life like in these remote areas. And so she was able to be there and meet these different people and really get an understanding of the work of SIL and what, what opportunities there might be for, um, her organization to, to come alongside of them.

Denise:

And so she's there, you know, Wycliffe is a big organization, and, and she, you know, they, they recognize the need for airplanes to help get the word where it's not. And she is there, think about it with an organization that's brand new. They have one full-time employee, they have zero airplanes, and she's trying to convince them we're the people for the job, you know? And so I think she, she actually felt like she did a good job and, you know, she was casting vision for them. And, and when she came back, she was encouraging to her board and saying, You know, I, I'm hopeful we don't have a, a, affirmation one way or the other with what they're gonna do. And so imagine their excitement when in January after her trip, she gets a letter from Cameron Townsend inviting them to provide airplanes and pilots to meet the Wycliffe requirements in Mexico and Peru.

Denise:

And so, I mean, everything they had been working for is finally, you know, we are going to get to put legs on this idea. And so they're like, Okay, well, well now we need a pilot and an airplane <laugh>, you know, it's real now. And so think about this, this is January when this is happening. And so they're going through the, the list of people. So they've got Grady and he's out because of the business end of C A M F. He's like, I'm gonna just have to be here. And Jim Truxton, his schedules booked. Nate

Saint's name was thrown out, but he was somebody that really wanted to finish college, You know, he's very interested in partnering with them. But, um, so they all turn and look at Betty and they're like, You're, you're it Betty. You're the woman, the man, you're the, you're the gal for the job.

Denise:

And so she became the first pilot for C A M F in the first work that they ever did. And so she's, you know, willing and able to do the job. And, and so the next thing is they have to pick out a plane. And so, you know, they just begin praying and they hear of a 1933 Waco by-plane for sale. Um, it's four seater. It had a bright new coat of paint that was of red on it. And when they asked how much they wanted, it was \$5,000. And even though they believed that was a good deal, they still didn't have that money. So they just began praying. And very quickly funds came in, including some of them on the board that personally gave money that they had been saving. And so they were able to purchase the plane. And in February, think about that, February 23rd, that is a month after they get the letter.

Denise:

They have secured a pilot and an airplane, and Betty is on her way to Mexico. When the Lord is in something, you just, there's no timeline problems. He's just gonna figure it out, right? And so, um, but on her first flight, you know, into the country, she's, she's hearing this popping noise in the engine and she's a little bit concerned about it and, you know, eventually lands to try to figure out what it is. And guess what the, the noise was, Sarah, Any ideas? The red, the bright red paint, the beautiful red paint is chipping off and flying into the engine. And so I'm just, you know, kind of laughing about that. But yeah, so why isn't anything terrible? The Waco plane was fine. Um, and so she actually gets to Mexico and begins her first work there.

Sarah:

Well, and she knew she wanted to get the work started in Mexico, but then there was work for her to do in Peru too. So she kind of wanted to get the program started there, but then move on to Peru. So, you know, she was getting really familiar with the plane and all of the different places that they were gonna be flying to and landing and the people and all of that. But then she was helping someone else who they were able to get to come and really be the person, be the pilot in Mexico. So as she was helping this guy get started, everything was going well. And then on one of their flights as he was, you know, really getting used to the plane and the different places, they had an accident when they were landing, it was like the guy had forgotten there was this little building or whatever next to the runway. He just forgot about it. <laugh>

Denise:

You know, I kind of feel for him, cuz I feel like that is something, you know, I would've done is like, Oh, I, I knew that mailbox was there, you know, but this is a big deal. This is a plane, this is the only plane that MAF has at the moment.

Sarah:

Well, and it was not just as simple like, oh we can just get repairs and it's fine. They had to try and figure out how do we get this repaired and where do we get the parts it.

Denise:

Well their wings, fell off <laugh>, this is not a, we're gonna just limp at home kind of scenario.

Sarah:

Right. Well, and essentially because of that, the plane, you know, really needed to be rebuilt, um, to get the wings functional. And so the person that actually came to do the repairs was Nate Saint. He had been in the military, he was very familiar with planes and repairs and because, you know, he had already this interest in MAF and in missionary work, um, he came and was able to get the plane going and that also allowed Betty to move on to her work in Peru.

Denise:

So at this point, this work is associated with Wycliffe and SIL and so Wycliffe has made arrangements for a plane, um, the plane that they choose and they work with the government to get, and it's, uh, in conjunction with some work that they're doing there. It wasn't necessarily the plane that MAF, well also, I should say in this time, C A M F has switched its name to MAF, with this Missionary Aviation Fellowship. So we will refer to it as that from now on out. But you know, MAF was more of a smaller plane scenario and they kind of had this idea, well, Wycliffe had bought a plane that was called the Grumman Duck, and apparently it's huge. And when Betty gets there to fly it, you know, there, there's some tension that begins with the purchase of this airplane between Wycliffe and MAF and she kind of gets caught in the middle of some of this stuff.

Denise:

So her whole time being here in Peru, just think about that. There's this tension that's kind of growing between an organization that she's kind of caught in the middle of. And not only that, she arrives as a woman to this military base to check out this plane that has been purchased. And the American military advisor looked down on her so much. He, first of all, he didn't really love the work that Wycliffe was doing, and the fact that she was a woman sent to fly, he says, I wonder what Wycliffe thinks it's doing by bringing in a girl to do a man's job. You know? And so she's just, that is the air that she is breathing right now and having to work in. So she's got tension between organizations, tension of people talking down on her, not believing that she can do the work.

Denise:

And you know, she's like, Well, I've been flying amphibians for six years and he's countering with, Yeah, but have you ever flown in the Andes? Have you ever flown in the Amazon jungle? And of course she hadn't yet, but she would become the very first woman to navigate the Andes and the Amazon jungle. Then she would later receive a pin, you know, honoring her with that. And um, and he just felt like this was too big of a ship for a woman to handle. And, and she just calmly states facts back to him, I have all the ratings required and Wycliffe has designated me to fly this aircraft. They have complete confidence in me. You know, she's just standing firm stating facts and not being overly emotional or tied to what this man thinks of her. And, um, and finally she gets him to connect her with the person that, you know, can help her get this plane in the air.

Denise:

She wants to fly it, she wants to feel what it's gonna be like. And, and she actually said, this was actually one of the more easier planes that I've ever flown. One of the challenging things about this particular plane was the landing gear. She had to crank a crank 54 times to raise and lower the landing gear. So that was a bit challenging. But, but when she finally completed her flight over the Andes, she rejoiced, she was so excited. But, but I think more than the accomplishment of knowing she was the first woman to do it, she was, she said she's more excited that she was able to fly into a remote spot where

missionaries really needed the services. And so she was rejoicing on, on both accounts. And so, you know, she was, she was there for several months before, um, she got some relief in the form of another pilot named Larry Montgomery.

Denise:

So this plane was, was a huge plane and it needed a lot of work. And so Larry was there to relieve some of the work that she was doing, but then also to be a part of the maintenance crew. So they were flying together and they heard this little sound in the engine and he was like, I think we need to work on this. So they landed the plane, they're working on it, he gets an emergency notification, I'm sure it's not a call, a letter. Somehow he's notified that he's having a family situation and he has to leave. And so he puts the plane back together. But he is like, Don't fly it unless you have to. I, we haven't figured out what's wrong. I'm not comfortable with it. And she's like, Well, I don't love being grounded, but surely there won't be an emergency while you're gone.

Denise:

Well, she was wrong. And a military commandant came to her on June 15th, 1947 and was like, Hey, two of my pilots have gone missing. They left on a short flight, they should have been back. They didn't have enough fuel to be gone this long and I really need your help to fly and look for them. And she's just torn because she's like, I was told not to fly. But the idea of a downed plane with possibly injured airmen needing help was just like, I've gotta try at least. And so for two days they searched for these pilots that were downed and, and finally she got the word that, okay, we're gonna regroup, we're gonna come back. And as she's beginning to fly back, you know, they navigated by the river, This is a plane that can land in water. She sees a bend in the river and then the engine stops.

Denise:

It's just stops. And she's like, trying not to panic. The commandant in the plane with her. And she's like, I have to remain calm. But she knows that because of that bend in the river, she doesn't have enough river to land the plane. And so she's trying and praying and turns and cranks it and one more time. And it just comes to life for a few more seconds. And she's able to climb about 20 more feet, which gives her enough elevation to be able to get past the bend in the river to a straighter portion of the river where she was able to land. And so when they finally, you know, bring the plane down, the commandant was like, How in the world did you remain so calm? And she says, Well, it's the Lord. And she gets to share with him about the Lord protecting them.

Denise:

And when Larry Montgomery finally, you know, returns and she tells him the story and he, he looks in the plane, he's like, It's dead in the water. And there is no explanation outside of the Lord why that engine would've refired one more time if it quit. There's no way it could have restarted. And so she just totally believes it was God giving her that extra 20 feet she needed to be able to land safely, you know? But there was lots of tension. Sarah, what are, what is all the things that she has been through? This was a rough season. We, we as global workers know the burnout symptoms, right. <laugh>

Sarah:

It was a lot. I mean she, I mean even if you go back to she's helping to start an organization, then all of a sudden she's the one going to Mexico to explore options. She's getting the program started there. She's going to Peru and getting things started there, there were kind of these different tensions between

Wycliffe and MAF and she was in the middle. She's flying hundreds and hundreds of hours, you know, for MAF and so just so much going on. She was tired, she was worn out. So then, you know, she gets this notification that her father is not well. And so she decides on her own that this is it, she's done, she's going home.

Denise:

Which was not like her because she usually was like in constant communication with her board and with the office in LA and she was like, you know, what should I do? Where should my next assignment? What's the work gonna be like? But this time here's a text from the letter that she sent. "Greetings. You never know what I'm gonna do next. And now it will be the last straw when I tell you I'm making plans to go home without getting your permission or okay". <Laugh>. So that's just a little glimpse into how Betty was doing in this season. She was done.

Sarah:

Yes, cause that was definitely not like her.

Denise:

No. And, and it kind of, you know, took everybody off guard, you know, her departure, it just baffled the MAF office and there, there were scrambling, but she was, she was just like, No, I need a break. Betty was burned out. So she just, after her Peru season, she spent a little time in the States.

Sarah:

Yeah. And she was able to study during this time. She, um, went back and was studying Latin American studies, learning Spanish. So, and helping her family like that was kind of a constant through the years of being able to go back and be close to her parents and just help out her family and rest. Because it had been an intense season and even in this time she wasn't, it wasn't like she was just cut off from MAF, you know, she was still part of prayer efforts and, um, encouraging them and speaking into different things.

Denise:

And I think after this time being able to do that, it really just refreshed her and told her, Okay, I'm ready. I can go back and serve again. And, and she was invited to Africa to fly in Nigeria. There was a family, a pilot who needed to go on furlough and she just, you know, decided to take its place. And this is another area of the world where there's remote needs that she really felt like she could meet. And so things that she was doing during this time, medical teams were flown to remote areas. I have been a part of those medical teams and seen the lines for hours and hours when people show up, whenever doctors in medicine arrive. It's so valuable and important and the ability to fly these people with expertise and these medicines that they can't get in. Absolutely. Oh, I wish I could remember, I read something somewhere, a statistic that said the amount of hours that MAF can save is the lifetime of so many missionaries. Did you read that somewhere?

Sarah:

No, I didn't. But I know even just in, as Betty was describing, you know, at this time where people would have to take trains and like trek through the jungle and all of this, like, and then it was, you know, a quick flight that she was able to provide. So yeah, it is, it is so valuable when you think of the time that is saved.

Denise:

Yeah. Imagine it's the work of one missionary becomes the work of five missionaries because of how much more they can get done in their lifetime. I mean, so valuable. So she's flying medical teams in, she's taken the kids to and from boarding school. That was a real, um, logical choice for many missionaries was their kids all gathered in one place for school. So they're flying them back and forth, the sicker going to the hospital, you know, But there are dangers associated with being in these remote places. You know, it is really easy to get disoriented when you're flying over the desert. You know, you, you look for landmarks, but when it's only sand, it's very easy to get disoriented. And so, you know, she flew into this area with a story of a recent pilot who was flying an Italian liner that became lost and crashed his plane in the desert.

Denise:

And he did not survive the crash, but the passengers were picked up by a traveling camel train that came through. I mean, it just like, this is where she was serving, you know? And so she had to learn things so different from the Amazon jungle, you know, she had to learn to follow camel tracks when she flew and follow, you know, dry river beds or something that could give her orientation as she was, as she was driving. And you know, there was a couple of experiences when she was in Africa. Um, you know, one of them, you know, this, this part of the world treats women differently, you know, so she was battling up against, in her own country, kind of fitting a mold that wasn't common of a woman in a man's job, a woman taking leadership positions, a woman being on a board of directors.

Denise:

You know, So she was used to battling that. But then, you know, in Africa and especially in Muslim countries, the way that women are treated a lot of times segregated, separated, not even allowed to talk to men, you know. So she's also then fitting into that tension here. But there was one time when she was invited to, she was flying a doctor to visit the Sultan and he actually could tell she was very interested and he pulled some strings and got her an audience with the Sultan. And so she's sitting with him and chatting about the plane and about flying, and as, as they get ready to leave, she's like, you know, I could fly over your palace if you'd like. And so she does, and she kind of waves at him and he's standing outside and waves to her. And so, you know, she actually broke through some, you know, stereotypical norms for women by being able to meet the Sultan in that time. And then, you know, her time ended there and we're, we're about at 1955, 56 and there's some other things that are happening at this time, Sarah, Some things that were hard.

Sarah:

Yeah. So she went back to the States and had a couple of years there, but she got an invitation to go to Sudan next. But at the beginning of 1956, they received word that Nate Saint, who had been the MAF pilot in Ecuador had been killed along with four other missionaries. Um, you know, we often talk about Jim Elliot as part of that group and you know, this was, this was a shock to many people around the world, but also particularly to MAF as they lost Nate Saint as their pilot. And so Betty had to delay this next assignment that she had been planning on to help in the MAF office and just, you know, kind of provide support in this time. That was very, very difficult.

Denise:

It was so surprising to me to realize how these stories overlap because I don't know, in my mind, a lot of times I separate out, you know, Elisabeth Elliott and Isobel Kuhn and like that, like their separate lives,

but they were living on top of each other, you know, during the same time zone. In our last podcast we talked about Isobel Kuhn and when Pearl Harbor and what that did, you know, to her service and things like that and how that affected her. And we're like, those things are happening here in this timeline. These are people that are living in conjunction with each other. And so to hear Nate Saint's name pop up here and that he was a part of this organization that he worked with Betty, that, you know, he himself then was an MAF pilot stationed in Ecuador mm-hmm. <affirmative> to ferry these men to places so that the gospel could be taken. You know, he was, his plane was an MAF plane. And so it was just, you know, the pictures that we might have in our mind right now because of the vast coverage of this in the States, you know, we might be thinking of that. And it's just, this is a little bit of connection, a backstory here overlapping with Betty Greene and, and her grief that came with that. Um, yeah. Before she was able to finally, you know, then take her place in Sudan, which, you know, we're talking about spring of 56, is that about right?

Sarah:

Yeah, yeah. April, April of 1956, she was finally able to then go to Sudan. Um, and it was challenging as she had in some of these other places, but women were not allowed to fly there. And so she had to get special permission to be able to have a license to fly in Sudan.

Denise:

Which I think, you know, when things are being like pushed across a desk, the fact that she's the first woman to fly across the Andes, you know, that she has military training experience, you know, all of these things, you know, helped open a door for her to get special permission as a woman to be a pilot in Sudan.

Sarah:

And one of the things I appreciated and, and noticed in her story, she never approached these situations where either she was ridiculed or, you know, sort of pushed away or thought less of because she was a woman in this role. She didn't come into it with an agenda or this bitterness in these situations. She just brought a lot of humility and perseverance. It did affect her. You know, she wrote in some of her different writing that it was very discouraging when she had some of these different situations. But she also knew so strongly that God had called her to this work. And so she could matter of factly, just explain her qualifications and she had a lot of them. Um, and she could share her experiences and then she just did the work that she needed to do, but with so much humility and grace.

Denise:

And as we contrast, you know, her other service in Africa, you know, when she was in Nigeria and was, you know, able to meet with Sultan and this experience was a little bit different and, you know, eye opening to her in that she was, you know, acknowledged by men, as you know, for her work and was invited to attend a party for one of, I think it was like the airport superintendent or someone who worked at the airport where she was at, and his son was getting ready to celebrate, I guess 40 days of life is a big deal. And so they were having a celebration. She was invited to a party and, and she hadn't experienced the segregation probably because of her, you know, line of work as that many women in Sudan had. And so when she was arrived at this party and was ushered immediately to a room of women, she kept waiting, When are they going to, when do we get to join the rest of the party?

Denise:

When do we get to, you know, And then hours went by and then she was ushered out back to her car and she's like, That was, that was it. You know, she felt like she missed out on talking to all these people and she just like really had a heavy heart for, you know, some of the women that, that was, you know, that was their world as they were separated from so much of what was going on, you know, and, and maybe to the women that was normal for them, but her, the heaviness she felt for it, you know, was really eye-opening in that, um, aspect. So her time in Sudan ended and she had one more really big, you know, part of service I think in, in New Guinea. Um, she's, she went there for a couple of years. And one thing I think it's good to point out that we haven't really talked about is we had a hard time separating out Betty Greene and MAF because they both have a lot of history and story to tell, and they overlap so much because she is one of the founders.

Denise:

And so there is so much to, you know, playing in here as an organization that we just didn't do a lot of history and research on. And so some of you that, you know, may be listening to this and understand some of the history and some of the way MAF works and you have input to put into this, we would love that. We just didn't have the time to totally research MAF history and everything accurately as we tried to just focus mostly on Betty Greene's service. But, but one of the things that does overlap a lot here is the philosophy that we understand to be MAF has to really go on the ground and survey a new runway before it opens in any, you know, remote area of the world. It can't be, we fly a plane into test it, it's no, someone on the ground has to go there first.

Denise:

And so while she was in New Guinea, there was a need for this airstrip to be open, but to get there from the closest point they could fly in to get there was days and days through the rough jungle. And they needed somebody who had the time to just go do it so that they could actually open this airstrip. And so she volunteered to be the pilot. It has to be a pilot that goes in and does this. And so she took the trek through the jungle, which if you read about this in any of her stories, there were a lot of moments that were terrifying for her: tiny bridges, vines, you know, um, sleeping out in the open and the jungle, you know. But that was part of the work. She was a pilot, but she also had to do the hard work to get the runway open. And, and there's a documentary that came out last year. Sarah, what is the name of that documentary that MAF did?

Sarah:

Yeah, it's called, uh, Ends of the Earth and it shares more about MEF and their particular work in Indonesia, some of the work that they're doing there. But then it also highlights a little bit about Betty Greene as well. And so, yeah, it's just kind of a, a good way to get an idea of what it's like, you know, to be an MAF pilot in some of these more remote places.

Denise:

Yeah. And it goes through the process of them doing this exact thing, opening an airstrip, and, you know, so kind of helps you to understand maybe a little bit more of what Betty was doing in this process.

Sarah:

Well, and if you've ever been in a small plane and landed, you know, like on a dirt airstrip or a grass airstrip, you want it to be safe <laugh>, you know, you want it to be the correct measurements and like

all of that. So it is really important to have that, um, have someone checking it out and making sure it's, it's good to go.

Denise:

Absolutely. And where we served the airstrip was behind our house that was, you know, had cows on it that you had to get off before you could land, you know, you had to buzz the airstrip. And, and, and MAF was the, you know, organization that flew us in and out. And so I'm super grateful for the work of Betty Greene to, you know, initiated, because I benefited from that years and years later. Yeah. But this was her last really term of service, um, as a pilot flying, um, cross-culturally. And, you know, she did, she returned to the US and she, she worked with recruits. She was very active in a prayer letter that, you know, went out from pilots serving on the field to partners who would pray. And, you know, she wanted to stay active and serve as long as she can. Um, but she began at 1990 to notice some things that maybe were changing.

Sarah:

Yeah. She started to realize she couldn't find her way to the grocery store and she couldn't remember the last part of her phone number and just some of those things. And so she was eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, um, and suffered with that, you know, for the next seven years of her life. She had a woman named Dorothy, who was a good friend of hers who had served with MAF in the home office. She had been a secretary for the leadership there. And so Dorothy moved into an apartment, you know, nearby to Betty. Betty had remained single her whole life. She'd had admirers, she'd had some opportunities for marriage, but every time she just knew that marriage and family and, for her, marriage and family and being a pilot couldn't work together. And she just really felt like God was continuing to call her to be a pilot. And so, you know, she didn't have a husband or children to take care of her in these years, but, um, her church in, in, um, Washington and this friend just really cared for her in those years of her suffering with Alzheimer's.

Denise:

And so seven years she suffered, and in 1997 we're told that she caught a bad cold and she recovered, but she really wasn't able to eat after that. And so they knew the end was coming. She had a friend check in on her and said, on this day, she was surprised to find Betty sitting up and alert in bed. And Betty was wanting to know if she knew God. And the woman was like able to say, Yes, I do. And she goes, Isn't it the most wonderful thing? And so, you know, her last real cognitive communications that she was able to do were, do you know God? And isn't it wonderful? And, and soon after that, Betty slipped into a coma and she died on April 10th, 1997. And with that, Betty exits the story, but her legacy lives on in so much of what happens today around the world.

Denise:

And we hope that we've handled her story well. We know that there's a lot of things and, you know, challenging aspects of being a woman in this field of organizational strife. As you know, there was a Wycliffe and MAF tension and, and we just aren't close enough to the story to get into the details or have any need to do that, except for to we as women who serve with different organizations understand that that's present. It, it's no organization is exempt from tensions that you have to live under. And, um, we're grateful to study Betty and to see her example of how she operated with humility and dignity and grace and love for all the parties involved. Um, and that through that we have this great legacy of hers to study.

Sarah:

And if someone is listening who got to meet Betty, perhaps through MAF or through all of her speaking, I would love, we would love to hear about that if you had an opportunity to know her or get to meet her. Um, cuz yeah, she just seems like such a neat woman.

Denise:

Yeah, she's one of the more contemporary women that we have covered. And so the fun thing about that is there are potentials, as we talked about, the overlapping of others that have become heroes of the faith that you may have overlapped with her. And I don't know, someday someone may be telling your story as well, which is what we're here for. We here at the Velvet Ashes Legacy Podcast wanna tell the stories so that you can be encouraged and to remember that you may be living the story, that will be the courage for someone else's legacy. We're so thankful to have you join us. Until next time.